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**UrbanRiver Visions Program Aims to Revitalize Riverfront Downtowns**  
**EOEA Plans Haverhill and Shelburne Falls “Visioning” Sessions**

BOSTON – As the Executive Office of Environmental Affairs (EOEA) prepares for a series of “visioning sessions” aimed at revitalizing urban riverfronts around Massachusetts, EOEA’s award-winning UrbanRiver Visions program will be highlighted at a conference that is expected to draw more than 250 New England river advocates, urban planners, and municipal officials to Boston next week.

“The Promise and the Challenge of Urban Rivers,” co-sponsored by the EPA and UMass–Boston’s Urban Harbors Institute, takes place Thursday, Mar. 29, at the Federal Reserve Bank of Boston, 600 Atlantic Ave. Following a plenary session, the all-day meeting gets under way with a workshop entitled, “UrbanRiver Visions: A Potential Model for New England?” with Kurt Gaertner, director of sustainable development in the Executive Office of Environmental Affairs (EOEA). Gaertner is joined on the panel by officials representing Hudson and Easthampton, two communities that have benefited from the EOEA program.

UrbanRiver Visions works with communities to restore the environment and revitalize urban areas through intensive planning sessions designed to build consensus around shared visions for urban riverfronts. Seven communities – Athol, Chicopee, Easthampton, Fall River, Hudson, Lawrence and Worcester – were selected for the program’s initial round in 2002. Following visioning sessions (known as “charrettes”) involving a wide spectrum of community stakeholders, each community adopted a unique riverfront plan and has begun to develop parks and walkways utilizing EOEA UrbanRiver Visions grants as well as other public and private funding.

Tomorrow (Sat., Mar. 24), EOEA will begin a second round of UrbanRiver Visions charrettes, with a day-long meeting in Shelburne Falls. In addition to Buckland/Shelburne Falls, communities selected for urban river planning in 2007 include Haverhill, Greenfield, Pittsfield, Grafton, and Northbridge. Each planning exercise is open to the public, and includes participation by municipal officials, local riverfront property owners, civic organizations and lawmakers. Haverhill’s meeting is scheduled for Sat., Mar. 31, and the other four will take place in April and May.

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“As avenues for transportation and commerce, rivers dictated the location of our cities in the Commonwealth’s early days, and they still harbor great potential as the lifeblood of our urban communities,” Environmental Affairs Secretary Ian Bowles said. “The UrbanRiver Visions program unites stakeholders around a consensus for enhancing underutilized and environmentally degraded riverfront sites. This program comes up with win-win solutions that lead to enhanced opportunities for recreation, economic development, and conservation.”

Projects up for discussion this year include a bikeway in Greenfield; a river walk in Haverhill; possible dam removal in Pittsfield; reuse of soon-to-be-vacant mill buildings in Buckland/Shelburne Falls; revitalization of a historic mill in Grafton; and solutions to riverbank erosion, flooding, and incompatible zoning along the Blackstone River in Northbridge.

In addition to Gaertner’s UrbanRiver Visions presentation, other EOEa officials participating in the March 29 conference include Director of Water Policy Kathy Baskin, who moderates a panel on contaminated sediments in urban rivers, and Smart Growth Coordinator Andrea Cooper, who takes part in a session exploring urban storm water issues.

For conference information, visit [www.epa.gov/ne/urbanrivers](http://www.epa.gov/ne/urbanrivers). To learn more about UrbanRiver Visions projects, visit <http://www.urbanrivervisions2.org>. For information about attending the Haverhill or Shelburne Falls visioning sessions (and/or walking site tours that precede each charrette), please contact the EOEa Public Affairs Office at 617-626-1119.

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